

Johnson Stresses Gains In Viet Nam 'Other War'

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F-Press

President Johnson, apparently encouraged by recent developments in South Viet Nam, continues to urge that U.S. news media give more publicity to the so-called "other war" in Viet Nam.

To make reporters' jobs easier yesterday, Johnson called them into his office and discussed a "very impressive" report he had just received from his special assistant on nonmilitary aspects of the Viet Nam war, Robert W. Komer.

The 44-page document, described by Komer as "mainly a review of accomplishments," was then distributed to newsmen. It was a document clearly designed to refute those who claim that the United States is only interested in a military victory in Viet Nam.

Komer said the report "demonstrates both real progress and growing momentum in the joint U.S.-Vietnamese effort to move that country forward, even in the midst of war."

Johnson told the newsmen he has been advised by a special committee to give more publicity to the "other war," but, he added, "I don't control the films."

This was another way of saying that the news media have not been paying enough attention to the nonmilitary aspects of the war—an administration complaint ever since the United States became engaged in major military action in Viet Nam.

Johnson is known to feel, for instance, that if the press—and especially television—were to play up the accomplishments in the civilian sector in Viet Nam, the administration's policies would be more popular in this country.

Some U.S. officials have been quite critical, for instance, of the television networks' apparent emphasis on the "blood and guts" side of the war, to the detriment of the less sensational side.

The news media have claimed they try to give a balanced report, but that the public simply remembers more vividly the lurid aspects of the war—the accidental bombings, the homeless children and the death of U.S. soldiers.

Last Sunday's elections have spurred Johnson to stress that

progress is being made in Viet Nam. He told the newsmen he regarded the large turnout as "a vote of confidence" by the Vietnamese people for the anti-Communist struggle.

The administration is reluctant to predict the future. Too many such predictions have proven embarrassing later on.

But there is a strong hope now that a civilian government will prove more stable than the military governments, and in time discourage the Communists from hoping they can take over South Viet Nam.

This is a long-range view, with the full knowledge that the elections simply chose a constituent assembly, and no one knows how this drafting body will evolve.

In his report, Komer said there were five major areas of accomplishment:

1. The "revolutionary development program" for the country side—the latest in a series of pacification plans. Komer said that since the beginning of the year, the source population has increased by about 230,000.

2. A campaign to preserve economic stability. He said that with U.S. aid, the Saigon government has taken steps to bring its economic house in order—"devaluing its currency, overhauling its fiscal system and employing budgetary restraints."

3. New stress on health, education and welfare. Reflecting Johnson's own interest in these fields, U.S. aid has increased substantially, Komer said.

4. Expansion of the already successful amnesty program. In the last eight months, Komer said, more than 12,000 persons have come back to the government side under the amnesty program. This is more than the total for 1965.

5. The elections. Noting the wartime conditions, Komer said the elections were "unprecedented" and will lead to a draf-